

Time of our Lights

Project proposal 1

Summary

Time of our Lights is a physical, yet metaphorical clock that scans live obituaries from the Web, displays the name of the deceased and uses a light display to embody those who have passed away. It is an homage to the deceased, a conceptual enthroning and a reminder of our own ephemeral, fragile condition.

Concept

Time of our Lights is a physical installation, a light sculpture, an eternal clock. Its shape is reminiscent of a ubiquitous new-media icon : the “preloader”. Typically presented to us while programs, web pages and diverse applications load on digital devices, it embodies time, transition, uncertainty, anticipation - it creates this “in between” period which periodically breaks our regular flow of thoughts. It splits our attention for undefined moments, create a temporary void, a break between intervals.



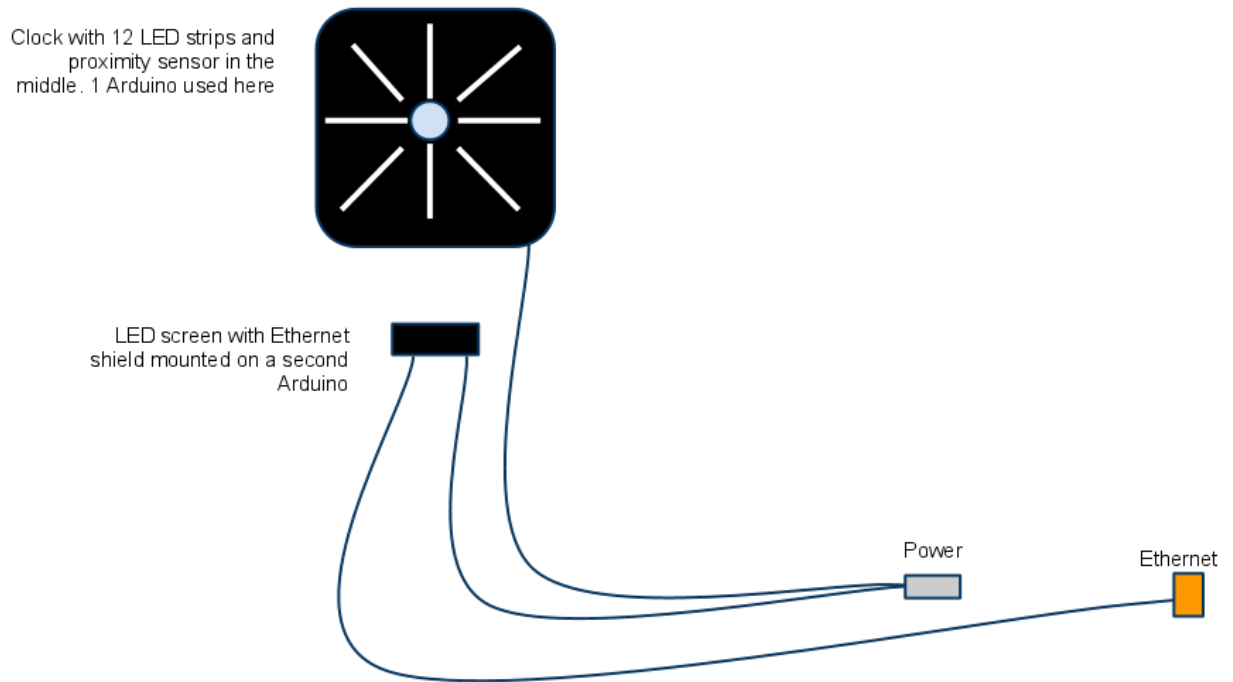
In this respect, the installation serves a dual purpose in its representation of time. First, the potentially infinite spinning of the icon becomes a symbol for havoc or an unexpected problem, conjuring an arsenal or negative connotations for all technology users of the world. On the other hand, it visually embodies the perfection of a circular motion with no start and no end, an infinite spectrum of light - an infinite cycle of life - dashing into infinity.

Function

The main rectangles making up the different vectors will be made of light tubes (LED), mounted on a large black board. This clock is connected to a live feed (RSS) of recently deceased people from the local community (Rotterdam). Reacting to people approaching it, the slow and dim display starts spinning faster and emitting more intense light as if sensing the presence of a human being. In a way, this reactive process is the “soul” of the piece, as if the dead could feel the presence of a living person coming up to them in order to read the small display. It is perhaps a simple introductory gesture, perhaps a severe warning, depending on the viewer’s personal experience and perspective - the audience completes the piece here. An LED screen shows us the name of the deceased along with the years they have lived (i.e. 1950-2010). As the viewer retracts from it’s reading position, the clock fades both in momentum and brightness, slumping gently into coma. It is a dreadful anticipation and somewhat morbid lottery emulation - the abstract, physical embodiment of people, and time, passing away.

On a more formal note, it would serve the installation’s purpose that the clock be mounted high upon a wall, about 8 feet or so, in such a way that would augment the object’s conceptual aura. I have chosen light as the primary representational medium to honour these people as I wish to make them literally “shine through” the installation, and hopefully this can rub off the people experiencing it. To this end, I believe the message could be more effectively transmitted if the installation was positioned to suggest viewers’ should literally ‘look up’ to it.

Diagram (simplified)



Technical (abridged)

Part 1 : the clock

- ~~8x LED tubes (~1 feet long each) to create the display~~
- 12x LED strips + chip-driving device
- a large mounting board to clasp it on (hiding the wires, etc.)
- sonar distance sensor

Part 2 : LED screen

- ~~27x4~~ (hopefully) screen to display information about current person's info
- 16x1

Part 3 : processing unit

- Arduino for main processing
- ethernet shield to use the Arduino's ethernet library
- relays to trigger on/off the different tubes (depending on how much voltage is needed)

Part 4 : PHP scraping

~~=I will be using a PHP scraper combined with a CRON job on my server to rake up the data from the Web, and create a centralized text file that can be queried by the XPORT on the Arduino shield.~~

- Arduino will be doing all the heavy work here on its own, connecting and parsing the XML to

read to the screen

Questions and concerns

- Is this feasible in a reasonable amount of time, with fairly low budget (~200EU) ?
- How can I make this modular, if I need to take it down or move it?
- Do I have any alternatives to LED tubes, as they are expensive?
- Should I consider another type of clock design that could also suit my needs?
- How can I amplify the dichotomy between death's natural, organic process, and the clinical, aseptic quality of its representation? Could I use audio to achieve this?
- How personal do I wish to be in respect to people's unique and singular experiences with death? Is there/where is the line between conceptual success, and slippery slope?
- Is the LED screen even necessary? Do it make it too literal and take away too much from what could be a complete transcending moment? On the other hand, absence of tangible data could render the piece as vague and incomplete perhaps?
- Related to, but pushing a bit the last question : do I even need people to understand what this piece is about? If the execution is beautiful enough, could the object simply live as an ode to time & technology? Would it just look like an Apple promo? Could this even be a better idea than the original one? [infinite regression...]

References, similar projects, keywords

http://www.ted.com/talks/billy_graham_on_technology_faith_and_suffering.html
<http://missioneternity.org/>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yGvWL7Vb7I8> (via www.constantdullaart.com)
<http://www.hollender.se/>

TAGS : death, faith, time, light, eternity, constance